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What we can learn from games

Handouts, Notes & “Answers” for presentation
21st Century Learning Conference HK, Feb 17-19

Handouts

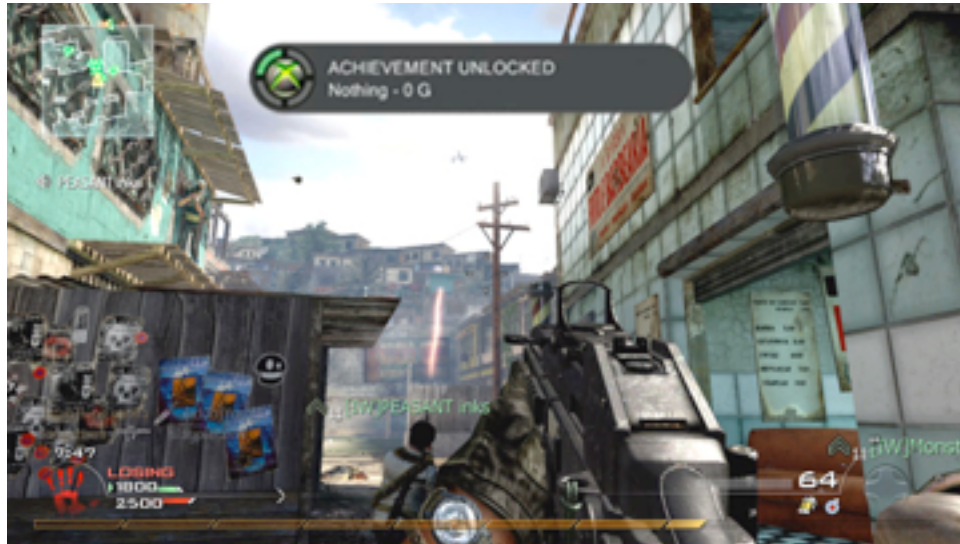
Handed out as individual cards to stimulate discussion.

Awards, achievements  regular student feedback  carrot-and-stick motivation	Leaderboards  soft pressure of open competition  too much emphasis on a score	Leveling up  clear indicators of progress & goals  encourages cheating the system	Plot, subplot, side story  characters, sets, stories engagement  story is a distraction to the subject
Videogame “addiction”  frequent and long periods of use  mental activity low during addiction	Avatars or characters  projection onto other situations  not a serious learning environment	Challenging friends  collaboration and group learning  cyberbullying, smart kid does it all	Virtual currency  “redeem” learning points for things  arbitrary/distracting monetary system

Examples of the concepts on each card on the following pages.

Examples of handout concepts

Awards, achievements



In the course of the game, players receive achievements for qualitative tasks completed, whether it's finding a secret passage or simply surviving unscarred.



On the Xbox videogame console, each player has their own profile. The profile stores their name, avatar (more on that later), messages from friends and achievements received from games.

Leaderboards



		pp
1	 gaz be rotten	5704880
2	 I LordPhoenix I	525735
3	 FlaredRobryan	391965
4	 oOoLENGENDoOo	335780
5	 DaNaRCHy	287155
6	 BassCr3ator	216060

Public displays of high scores from different people. Raises the stakes for competition and creates a sense of other people out there in the community.

Leveling up



When players spend time successfully completing different parts of the game, they often gain experience points. Once a critical mass of points are accumulated, players can “level up” their character -- spend the points powering up to gain new abilities/items/appearances.

Plot, subplot, sidestory



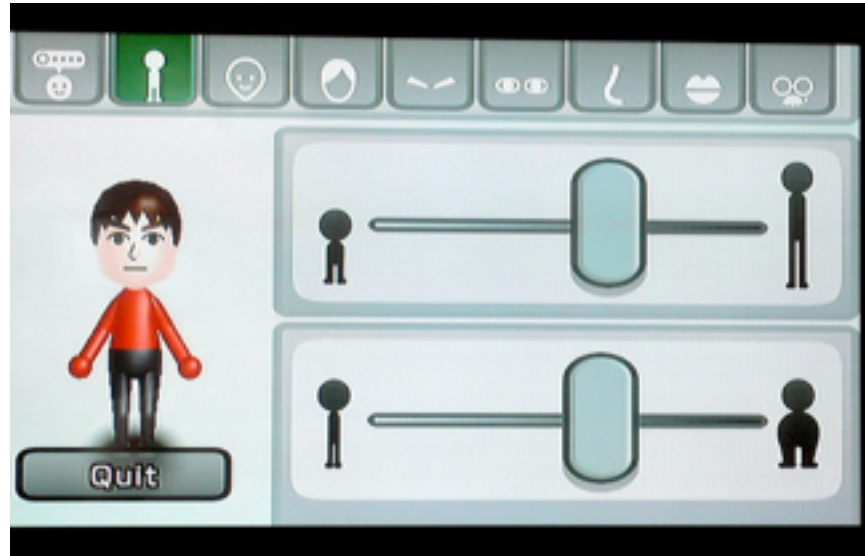
Self-explanatory. Intriguing setting, buildup and climax, interesting characters.

Videogame addiction



Self-explanatory. Is it a myth? Can people be addicted to sports? To homework?

Avatars or characters



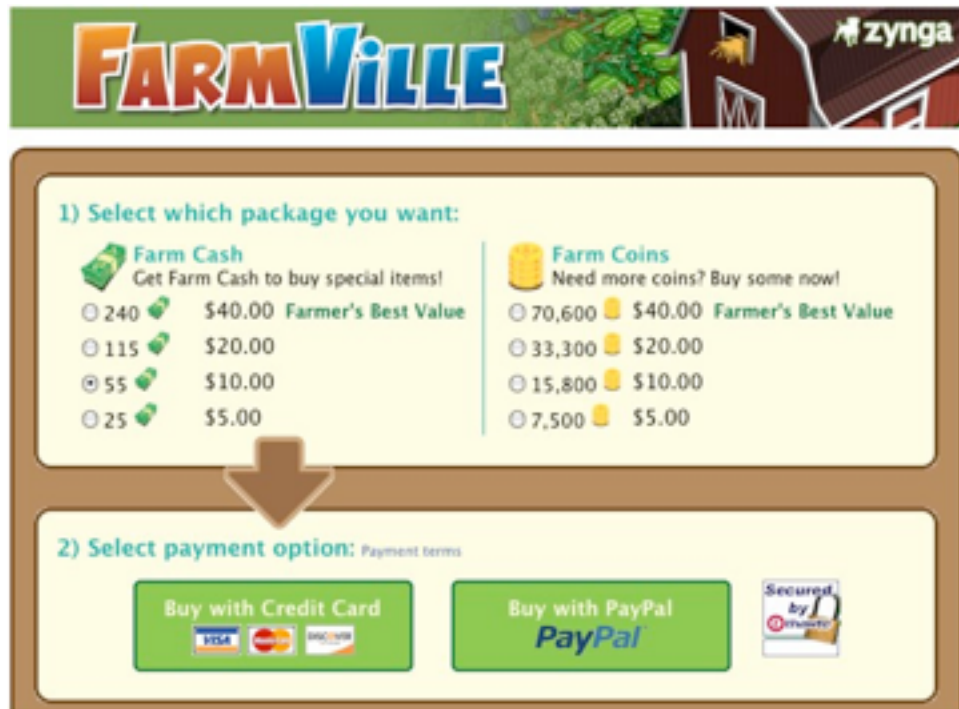
Players like to create digital versions of themselves, sometimes based closely on themselves in real life, sometimes taking on fictional personas.

Challenging friends



Many of the most successful games (especially recently) are multiplayer, small group activities. Team up against one another, collaborate with one another -- sometimes it's just another place to hang out after school.

Virtual currency



Many games have their own in-game currency systems. Players earn money by successfully completing tasks within the game, or buy it with real world money. This money can then be redeemed within the game for new things -- a nicer shirt for your avatar or a bigger plot of land for your farm.

“Answers”

Of the eight concepts we presented, here is what we at 3D Avatar School have done with them. Keep in mind we are still less than one year old and our product is subject to change.

Awards, achievements



We are prototyping an achievement system as a method of positive feedback that marks progress on language-learning tasks that aren't necessarily quantifiable. As achievements accumulate in the student's profile, they also gain a sense of pride and naturally want to do more.

Leaderboards

We have not implemented leaderboards right now, but we hope to do so in the middle term as our learning community grows. For example, when a student looks at his achievements for semester three, it would be great if he could see how his peers were doing or even how other people from other schools was doing.

Leveling up

We don't have any short-term plans to implement a leveling up system because it encourages gaming the system to get extra points. Finding workarounds or loopholes happens in games so often now that the game designers purposely leave them in there for players to find. In the case of language learning though, finding a loophole around learning is not a good idea.

Plot, subplot, sidestory



Most of our learning modules incorporate creative writing and storytelling elements. Whether it's a more lush setting, an actual roleplay with characters and costumes, or simply the choice of vocabulary that is more appealing for the target group.

Videogame addiction

We hope to leverage the multi-hour, long-term engagement that players have when they are “addicted” to videogames. Keep in mind, we do not want addiction-enabled behaviors (and the associated zombie-like state). As educators though, we do appreciate an experience that doesn't end at the forty-five minute mark.

Avatars or characters



Not only do students have fun creating and dressing their avatars, but they also benefit from having a digital version of themselves for language learning. To begin with, the shyer kids and teens often feel more comfortable speaking out in a foreign language behind the guise of someone else. Additionally, having an avatar encourages students to try new behaviors, try new sayings and in terms of roleplays, get in character and become involved in language expression.

Challenging friends



Most of our lessons are collaborative and/or competitive. Classes involve 3-6 students and activities are student-centered and constructivist. When the class is freed from being a one-way monologue of teachers to students and becomes a peer-to-peer learning experience, students tend to perk up, pay attention and challenge themselves much more.

Virtual currency

We have no short-term plans to implement a virtual currency for a similar set of reasons for why we haven't looked into a leveling up system. A virtual currency would be more apt for subjects with a high level of quantitative reasoning, but for learning Chinese, it seems a distraction at the moment.

Questions?

I've tried to address the concerns and questions that came up during my workshop as best as I could. But if you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at:

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As I said, we are a new company and our product is undergoing development and change every week. If you are interested in seeing some of these things in action, don't hesitate to ask for a demo.